United Nations E/CN.9/2009/NGO/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 January 2009

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development
Forty-second session
30 March-3 April 2009
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up actions to the recommendations of the International Conference on Population and Development

Statements submitted by World Population Foundation, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statements, which are being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.9/2009/1.

09-21285 (E) 100209

Statements*

Young people's sexual and reproductive rights

Over the past two decades, Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), including those of young people, have gained increased recognition in platforms such as the Cairo Programme of Action (PoA), the Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, many of these policies have not materialised into action and adequate resource allocation; and laws have not been enforced consistently. Adequate funding by governments and inter-governmental agencies has proven difficult. The international community is undermining the integrity of its commitment by not honouring funding targets. Donor countries currently provide only half of the amount pledged in the PoA ($3.1 billion instead of the $6.1 billion promised by 2005). Donor support for contraceptives and condoms has decreased since 1994, and many countries now face a shortage of supplies.[1]

The current generation of young people is the largest the world has ever known, with approximately 1.5 billion young people between the ages of 12 – 24 worldwide, 1.3 billion of whom live in developing countries.[2] While we are in the year 2009, we continue to see regression in many States, where sexuality education is banned and censored, SRHR services are made unavailable to young adolescents, HIV treatment is made inaccessible, women continue to be sidelined and abused, as do lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

The direct consequences of the denial of the SRHR of young people in practice has led to young people being the most severely affected by sexually transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS – almost 1/4 of those living with HIV are under the age of 25, and 1/3 of women living with HIV are between 15 and 24 years of age (see A/60/61-E/2005/7). Fewer than 40% of young people have basic knowledge of HIV transmission.[3] Young women are particularly at risk, as gender inequality reduces the ability of young women to negotiate condom use, to access services and education, and increases their exposure to violence and sexual abuse, including rape. Further, approximately 14 million young women between the ages of 15 and 19 years give birth every year. The majority of teenage births occur in the developing world, where the proportion of women who have their first child by age 18 is often between 25 – 50%.[4] The leading cause of death for young women aged 15 – 19 worldwide is pregnancy, with complications from childbirth and unsafe abortions as leading factors (see A/60/61-E/2005/7).

Without the leadership, capacity building and meaningful involvement of young people, these figures will only get worse. Young people are part of every constituency. Young people are

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* Issued without formal editing.

[1] UNFPA: National progress in implementing the ICPD Programme of Action 1994 – 2004. Geneva, 2005

[2] World Bank. World Development Report 2007.

[3] WHO, UNAIDS, UNICEF, "Towards Universal Access, Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector, Progress Report, 2007.

[4] Alan Guttmacher Institute. "Into a new world: young women's sexual and reproductive lives" Available at: http://www.agi-usa.org/pubs/new_world_engl.html.

women, men, people living with HIV, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, injecting drug users, sex workers, in and out of school, working or seeking employment, religious and in all cases, young people have a tremendous capacity to achieve positive change in their communities when supported with the relevant skills, knowledge and resources. The right of young people's participation and the reality of their reproductive health and rights were acknowledged for the first time in 1994. The upcoming 15th anniversary of the ICPD provides an important opportunity to have young people's voices heard and demand that governments honour their commitments on ICPD goals for 2015.

What do young people need – countdown to 2015

- Access to contraceptives, comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health care.

- The international community must recognise that comprehensive sexual education is a right that should be available to all young people, regardless of social, cultural, religious, sexual or HIV status.

- Recognition of the growing and special needs of youth and adolescents, including reproductive and sexual health issues, and taking into account the special situations they face, particularly those of young women.

- Recognition of the effects of gender based violence and early marriage on the development of girls and young women.

- The United Nations system and donors should complement and enhance Government' efforts to mobilise and provide adequate resources to respond to young people's needs (see A/S-21/5/Add.1).

- Acknowledgement and support of youth and youth organisations as indispensable partners in decision-making processes and development, by involving youth organisations in the planning, implementation and evaluation processes related to ICPD.

- Contribution to the capacity and development of sustainable youth participation and partnerships with youth.

- More opportunities for youth to generate income, secure financing and funds to establish projects and organisations for and by young people that focus on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

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Make Rights Real

Introduction: promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights through a rights-based approach

Full sexual and reproductive health for all cannot be achieved without respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights. In reality, however, implementing sexual and reproductive health projects using a Rights-Based Approach can be challenging. International rights and local realities are sometimes far apart.

The conference on rights and realities in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights, organised by Youth Incentives and World Population Foundation, November 10-11, 2008, in Rotterdam, The Netherlands, discussed a rights-based approach to sexual and reproductive health in the realities of the working environments of participants, with the objective of reaching reproductive health for all by 2015.

What is a Rights-Based Approach?

The human rights norms, standards and principles are contained in international and regional treaties and declarations and include the principles of accountability, empowerment, participation and non-discrimination.[5] When ratified, they are legally binding and states are obligated to protect, promote and fulfill these human rights.

A rights-based approach to health means integrating human rights norms and principles in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of health-related policies and programmes. These rights include human dignity, special attention for the needs and rights of vulnerable groups, and an emphasis on ensuring that health systems are made accessible to all. The principles of equality and freedom from discrimination are central, including notably freedom from discrimination on the basis of sex and gender roles. Integrating human rights into development also requires special efforts for empowering poor people, ensuring their participation in decision-making processes that touch their lives and incorporating accountability mechanisms which they can access.[6]

The Rights-Based Approach to Sexual and Reproductive Health

The rights-based approach recognizes and respects all people as sexual and reproductive beings who have the right to correct information, access to services and education, but who also need to be protected from sexually transmitted infections/HIV, violence, coercion, discrimination, stigmatization and unwanted pregnancies. A rights-based approach calls for the conditions that make it possible for people to live their lives with confidence, pleasure and safety in all aspects of sexuality.

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[5] Available from www.unhcr.ch/development/right.html.
[6] See www.who.int/trade/glossary/story054/en.

Why is a Rights-Based Approach to Sexual and Reproductive Health important?

Unwanted pregnancies, HIV infections, gender based violence, homophobic violence, sexual violence, lack of access to education for women and girls are among the consequences of not adhering to a rights-based approach. Without realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights, the Millennium Development Goals that relate to sexual and reproductive health and rights (especially Goals 3, 4, 5 and 6) will not be achieved. The Cairo Programme of Action reflected in the target added to Goal 5 in 2005 "Reproductive Health for all in 2015" will remain far from being realized.

As many countries have recognized the sexual and reproductive health and rights of people by signing on to international treaties and declarations, governments - as primary duty bearers - can be held accountable to realize the rights and can be used to overcome these challenges. But institutions and civil society organizations have an as important role to play in realizing sexual and reproductive health and rights, both as rights holders and as duty bearers towards their target groups and towards holding their governments accountable. In fact every individual has a role to play, in his or her professional as well as private life.

To underline the importance of the Rights-Based Approach to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, the 250 participants of the conference "Rights and Realities in promoting sexual and reproductive health and rights" (Rotterdam, 10-11 November 2008) from 5 different continents have adopted the following recommendations:

For sexual and reproductive health and rights to be realized human rights have to be applied to sexuality.

We, participants of this conference, believe that by putting rights based principles into practice, we will contribute towards reaching sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

Therefore, we call upon ourselves, our colleagues of non-governmental organizations and policy makers at all levels, to put rights based approaches into practices by:

- Advocating for and working towards the full implementation of the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development held in Cairo in 1994 and the Beijing Platform for Action

- Advocating towards the realization of the Millennium Development Goals, with a particular focus on Goal 3 - gender equality - and Goal 5 - maternal health - target of reproductive health for all in 2015

- Ensuring meaningful participation of all stakeholders at all levels of decision making within our organizations and within government bodies

- Working towards rights based comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services for all with a particular focus on young people
- Strengthening a positive approach towards sexuality by promoting the conditions that make it possible for people to live their lives with confidence, pleasure and safety in all aspects of sexuality
- Promoting non-discrimination, empowerment, participation and accountability within our organizations, programmes and projects
- Monitoring governments' adherence to rights based treaties at the UN and regional level and acting when necessary to ensure governments honour their commitment
- Providing sufficient budget allocations and donor funds for development and implementation of policies and programs that promote sexual and reproductive health and rights at all levels and that enable meaningful participation of all stakeholders
- Bridging the gap between process oriented Rights-Based Approaches and result oriented donor requirements by long-term commitments and process oriented results
- Developing and providing practical tools to apply the Rights-Based Approach effectively